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In spite of the decay into which the Vedda social fabric has fallen, I believe that the expedition may be considered to have achieved a considerable measure of success, since it has brought to light a number of facts hitherto unknown. This result is largely due to my wife, for I feel convinced that the measure of success attained in gaining the confidence of these shy and extremely jealous people was entirely due to her presence and assistance. Not only would it have been impossible otherwise to obtain certain important results in special departments, as for instance the phonograph records of lullabies, but I should never have had the opportunity of studying Vedda family life with the degree of intimacy which her presence made possible. It must not however be thought that the assistance she rendered was of the somewhat passive kind which the presence of any sympathetic woman would have given. Indeed, the opposite was the case, for, with a single exception, the ceremonial dances described in Chapter IX were recorded by Mrs Seligmann, while I devoted the whole of my attention to obtaining a reasonably complete series of photographs. So fully did she share in the work in this and many other ways that when working up our results I found that my original idea of a volume containing a number of jointly written chapters by no means did justice to her work, and her name therefore appears as that of joint author of this book.

126 With regard to the dances photographed, those witnessed at Sitala Wanniya and Bandaraduwa were performed in the depth of the jungle under circumstances which necessitated under-exposure in spite of the use of the most rapid plates. Hence a number of the photographs reproduced in Chapter IX have been more or less "faked," the detail being painted in on bromide prints and fresh negatives prepared. Probably no one will have any difficulty in recognising the photographs which have been treated in this way, but in order to avoid any possibility of a mistake those plates which have been touched up are indicated by an asterisk.

OTO The translations and transliterations of the charms in Chapter VIII and the invocations in Chapter X have been prepared by Mr. Henry Parker, late Assistant Director of the Ceylon Irrigation Department, who has also read through and

23) custom of the country and also selling those they have bred themselves. However, all this was unknown to us when we first met the people, nor would it have been possible to guess their prosperous condition from the first sight of their settlement.

123 It was well known throughout the Veditata that investigations were about to be made among the Veddas, and all the village headmen had been given instructions to render assistance. They therefore told the Veddas to expect us, and would have sent for them to come to the Public Works Department bungalow on our arrival had we not expressly stated that we preferred to visit the people in their homes. A very rough track led to the top of the Danigala Hill, about 1200 feet high, where, on a rounded shoulder of rock, stood the skeleton hut of the Danigala Veddas shown in Plate II. This was built on the pattern of the ordinary village Vedda habitations but entirely lacked the slats of bark which make the sides moderately weather proof. By its side was an even rougher shelter consisting of a large bough with the smaller branches trimmed and overlaid with banana leaves. Kaira the patriarch or "senior" of the group sat outside the hut with three other men; there were also present three women, a boy of about 12, and two younger children, and although both of the latter had many teeth they suckled persistently. This hut and some of its occupants are shown in Plate II, the rough shelter by its side in Plate XI, figure 1.

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123 Although Mr Bibile, whom all these people knew quite well, was with us, they were quite apathetic, their attitude was clearly not the result of shyness, but simply due to the fact that they took no interest in our presence; the women continued to suckle their infants and the men squatted or lay upon the rocks and chewed in gloomy silence, and when addressed they grunted "yes" or "no." One of the infants who smiled and cooed and tried to gain our attention was the only member of the group who seemed to take the least notice of us. Kaira told us that the people we now saw represented all that remained of the Danigala Veddas. We noticed some bananas (which do not grow wild in Ceylon) on the further side of the ridge and we asked to see their plantation. A prompt denial of its existence was the result, though Kaira afterwards told Mr Bibile that he

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would show him his chena but that he did not wish the white people to know anything about it. Further talk with these people showed that it was impossible to obtain reliable information from them, they had been utterly spoilt as the result of being frequently interviewed by travellers.

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The Veddas have long been regarded as a curiosity in Ceylon and excite almost as much interest as the ruined cities, hence Europeans go to the nearest Rest House on the main road and have the Danigala Veddas brought to them. Naturally the Veddas felt uncomfortable and shy at first, but when they found that they had only to look gruff and grunt replies in order to receive presents they were quite clever enough to keep up the pose. In this they were aided by the always agreeable villagers ever ready to give the white man exactly what he wanted. The white man appeared to be immensely anxious to see a true Vedda, a wild man of the woods, clad only in a scanty loin cloth, carrying his bow and arrows on which he depended for his subsistence, simple and untrained, indeed, little removed from the very animals he hunted. What more easy than to produce him? The Nilgala headman sends word when strangers are expected, then the Veddas repair to their very striking hut on the rock dome and often post a look-out on a big rock about half way up, for on our second visit the leading man of our party who was carrying the camera stated that he saw a Vedda bolting from this rock as we came up. These folk, who when we saw them wore their Vedda loin cloths and were smeared with ashes, are reported to wear ordinary Sinhalese clothes when not in their professional pose, and Mr Bible, who has himself seen one or more of them in sarongs, points out that the imposture is kept up for two main reasons; firstly, they fear that their cultivation might be stopped (evidently an echo of the chena difficulty of the Eastern Province), or that they might be taxed if they did not appear to be poor fellows living on hardly won jungle produce; secondly, their pose of poverty interests strangers and procures them visitors, whose generosity is the greater the more primitive their mode of life appears to be.

[29]

As a matter of fact the Danigala Veddas like those of Henebedda (with whom we became really friendly) keep cattle 231

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instead of *adaḍi*, *tīra* being a Tamil word, so that a composite word meaning "really nothing" is now used. 127

At the present day there are probably no more than a dozen families left as representatives of the Kovil Vanamai Veddas and all of these live on Sinhalese chenas and are in dire poverty. 511
[16]
The country has been referred to already as unhealthy, monkeys although abundant are not easily approached especially in the dry season, and other game is scarce. Isolated families have settled down in Sinhalese villages to pick up whatever living they can as occasional hired labourers, and some of these people were seen in a wretchedly starved condition. The most prosperous are three families living on the large Sinhalese chena (Plate XII, figure 1) at Bandaraduwa near Devulani tank. But even with the assistance of the chena these people are not well off, and it appeared that they were no strangers to hunger. Owing to their position on the border of the Sinhalese and Tamil country, they had been influenced by both Hinduism and Buddhism to a certain extent. In spite of this they knew numerous Vedda songs and incantations, and the ceremonies following a death which occurred in the vicinity during our visit clearly demonstrated that foreign ideas formed but a thin stratum overlying their own beliefs. 127

The Uniche Veddas were not seen in their own country but some men were brought to us by the Forest Ranger, Mr S. Ferrera, at Maha Oya, where the photograph shown in Plate XII was taken. We have no note that these Veddas were Uru *warags* men, but it seems probable that they represented the Uru *warags* community recorded (as mentioned by the Vedda *Arachi*) on the last page. They had retained their own customs and beliefs very largely and appeared to be living in a condition very similar to the people near Devulani, though perhaps they were better fed. 123 614

Sitala Wanniya. After visiting so many decaying or degenerate communities a refreshing state of affairs was found at Sitala Wanniya. Here there were at least four families who were living the life their forefathers had lived for generations without perceptible change. They still found game, honey and yams in quantities sufficient not only to support life, but to leave 511
439

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temperament. Travellers have called the Vedda morose, and stated that he never laughs; this belief has doubtless been strengthened by the disagreeable behaviour of the "show" Veddas (see p. 50), yet Veddas have told us how they throw leaves in the air and laugh and dance for joy. Nevill was certainly right when he said, "They are a merry people, delighting in riddles, songs and jests. Mr Hartshorn observed some Vaeddas who never laughed in his presence. They must have been either terrified, or sulky and offended, for those I have seen, of all clans, laugh often and merrily, a habit very strongly contrasted with that of the Sinhalese, who scarcely ever go beyond a smile. They burst into a verse of song, now and again, apparently from sheer exuberance of spirits, and any ludicrous incident amuses them!" 152

At Bendiyaalge we were particularly well situated to observe their behaviour, our camp being out of sight of the Vedda cave but within 200 yards of it, here we could listen to their unrestrained chatter and laughter which was especially noticeable at sunset. It is true that their faces express no emotion of pleasure or gratitude when they are given exactly what they expect. Thus, white cloth, which the men like to wear, is well known to them, they buy it themselves from the Moormen pedlars, it is the usual present for a European to make to Veddas, and they receive it with perfectly stolid faces, and are hence dubbed sullen. We had an excellent example of this at Henebedda when we gave a piece of white cloth to Poromala the senior of the group, whom we knew well and who had frequently smiled and laughed in our presence. When, however, a sharp pruning knife was given him his face beamed like a schoolboy's, he ran his thumb along the blade and tried its edge on pieces of grass. Things new to them which we showed

¹ *Taprobanian*, Vol. 1, 1886, p. 193. Veddas often dance for a few moments when pleased, thus a Henebedda Vedda on being given a piece of sacking to cover himself with after complaining of cold, immediately held it over his head, bowed his body forward and went through a few dance steps, singing the while. On another occasion this man and three companions (all young men) began to dance spontaneously. This was about 9 p.m. one night in the courtyard of the Ambilline Rest House, where they had visited us, their sense of well-being in this case may have been stimulated by a liberal feed of curry and rice which had been given them, but we do not think they danced in payment for this. [535
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XXVI.—*An Account of the Wild Tribes of the Veddahs of Ceylon: their Habits, Customs, and Superstitions.* By JOHN BAILEY, B.A., Oxon., Principal Assistant Colonial Secretary of Ceylon.

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"We shall, in this part, speak of the inhabitants of this Country, with their Religion, and Customs, and other things belonging to them. Of these Natives there be too Sorts—Wild and Tame. I will begin with the former. For, as in these Woods, there are Wild Beasts, so Wild Men also."*

So wrote, nearly two hundred years ago, that truthful old chronicler Robert Knox; and, though he praises God he never saw one of these "wild men," he proceeds, nevertheless, to give us in a couple of pages, by far the best sketch of the Veddahs that has yet appeared, notwithstanding the multitude of pens that have been employed since his time, on Ceylon.

Early in 1854, I was appointed to the charge of the extensive district of Badulla, which comprises, besides the ancient Kandyan province of Ouvah, that portion of the island where the most barbarous Veddah tribes are found. My tastes led me to take every opportunity of studying their habits and customs. My official position gave me the greatest possible facilities for prosecuting my inquiries.

I accumulated much information that was both curious and valuable, but my official duties prevented me from shaping my rough notes into a readable form. For years, my papers lay in my desk, half forgotten, and it is only now that a little unlooked

* An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon, in the East Indies, etc., by Robert Knox, a Captive there near twenty years, folio, London, 1681.

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written from memory aided by not very adequate notes made shortly after the ceremony, helps to fill up a lacuna in the hitherto published records of Vedda customs and ritual. 121
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In June of 1925 I was engaged, as a junior administrative officer, in dealing with an outbreak of cholera among the Muslim tobacco cultivators in the neighbourhood of a remote coast Vedda village, about forty-four miles north of Batticaloa on the Batticaloa-Trincomalee coast road. Investigation by the medical officer with whom I was associated soon revealed the fact that the focus of the infection was a yet more remote inland district lying behind that part of the coast, and that to grapple effectively with the disease it would be necessary to evacuate the population of that area and to concentrate it, for the treatment of the actually sick and for the segregation of the "contacts," in the comparatively accessible locality where we had already established ourselves, not far from the spot where the first cases to be brought to our notice had occurred. I therefore found myself obliged, at short notice, to enlarge the camp of which I had already begun the construction, and in particular to begin the building of a new hospital hut on a more grandiose scale than that originally contemplated. For the work of construction, which consisted of the erection of a framework of jungle sticks and the covering of it with *cadjans*,—dried and plaited palm branches,—according to the familiar village method, it was necessary to enlist the services of the coast Veddas of the adjoining settlement. The villagers were naturally reluctant to engage in work which they not unreasonably supposed would expose them to the infection, and it called for much tact and persuasiveness on the part of the Chief Headman of the *pattu* to get them to do so. Fully realizing that, apart from all other considerations, the occurrence of even one case of cholera among them would effectively put a stop to all co-operation, the Chief Headman and I took, successfully as the event showed, every possible precaution to prevent such a catastrophe. Everything seemed to be going on without let or hindrance when the Chief Headman upset my calculations by announcing that the work must cease for twelve hours on the 8th of June, to enable the villagers to perform a ceremony in honour of the *Periya Devi* 123
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123 (Great Goddess).^{*} It was in vain that I pointed out the urgency
 796 of the work and protested against any delay, even going the
 796 length of suggesting that the ceremony should be postponed.
 After a good deal of futile argument I was obliged to resign
 myself to the inevitable.

My chagrin was to some extent lessened when the Chief Headman approached me with an invitation from the people to be present at the ceremony. The invitation was welcome, for it offered an alternative to an evening spent in the company only of a book and of my own thoughts in the solitude of the one-roomed "rest house" where I had my temporary quarters. It was accordingly arranged that the Chief Headman should come to fetch me after my dinner.

The moon,—full two days before,—had already risen when the Chief Headman and his following of village notables emerged from the shadows of the jungle bordering the high road. I got up from the long chair in which I had been sitting on the verandah and joined them, and we set off northwards along the road. After walking along it for about half a mile we turned off to the right through alternate thick jungle and open spaces overgrown with *illuk*-grass, and with here and there a solitary tree casting a deep black shadow under the white light of the moon, in the direction of the mouth of the river which crossed the high road about three and a half miles to the north of our camp. We had
 [534] gone in this way perhaps a mile in all when I began to be aware of the rhythmical throbbing of a tom-tom, at first only faint in the distance, somewhere ahead in the jungle. I recollect well the feeling of growing excitement as the sound grew gradually louder and more insistent with our advance. Another mile, and the path which our party was following, at that point through thick jungle, took a sharp turn to the right, and we suddenly found ourselves in a large circular clearing, surrounded by high timber. To our right as we entered were the spectators, squatted upon the ground in rows and facing towards that part of the enclosure which lay to our left. Even the fringes of the jungle seemed to be

^{*} This goddess is presumably the goddess Ammal, "who sends small-pox and skin disease": see *The Veddas*, p. 336.

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full of people. To our left was a shrine set up against the jungle wall in that quarter. In a space left clear in front of the shrine stood what can best be described as a sort of "maypole," and between the "maypole" and the spectators was a small area enclosed by lengths of coloured cloth stretched between upright sticks. Within this area could be seen a small temporary booth, with human figures moving about a fire, over which, the Chief Headman informed me, rice was being cooked to be offered to the goddess. 123 796

When we reached the clearing the ceremony had not yet begun. I was conducted to a seat of honour in the front row of the spectators, and sat there for some minutes looking round with interest on the scene, which was lighted here and there by the flare of torches, and listening to the monotonous throb of the tom-tom, which was apparently being played somewhere close by in the jungle. Suddenly the tom-tom took on a more staccato note. Excitement rose among the spectators; and presently, from a gap in the jungle wall on my right and rather behind me as I sat facing the shrine, there defiled into the clearing a procession which slowly threaded its way through the ranks of the spectators to the clear space in front of the shrine. In this procession there were carried two wooden ceremonial swords,* which were to be prominent in the dances which followed. In front of the shrine the procession stopped, and a ritual of some sort, the exact nature of which it was impossible to gather in the semi-darkness, was gone through. [373]

At the conclusion of the ritual at the shrine a red flag, bearing embroidered upon it the sun and moon and two human figures, and another device the details of which I was unable to distinguish, but which was possibly the figure of a ship, the emblem of Kapalpe, was hoisted upon the "maypole." This was, perhaps, the formal beginning of the ceremony, for after the hoisting of the flag flowers were brought in baskets, as a mark of respect, to the Chief Headman and myself. Under the Chief Headman's [576]

*These swords resembled the ceremonial swords (*van haduwa*) seen by the Selligmans only in the ceremony of the invocation of Rahu Yaku at Sitala Wanniya, (fifty miles from the place at which the ceremony here described was performed), and illustrated on p. 236 of *The Veddars*.

- 123 guidance I touched the flowers in acknowledgement. After this
796 the rice which had meanwhile been cooked in the enclosure in front of the shrine was offered to the goddess at the shrine, and the enclosure itself was removed.

The offering of the rice appeared to mark the conclusion of the first stage of the ceremony, for it was followed by a procession of those who were to take part in the subsequent dancing,—apparently accompanied by the image of the goddess,—out of the clearing and, as I was informed, down to the river about half a mile away for the sacred bath.

Time dragged by. The moonlight flooded the clearing, showing the ranks of the spectators sitting in their places with oriental patience and talking in undertones. At last the procession of dancers re-entered the clearing and advanced to the open space in front of the shrine. Here a ritual was gone through which seemed to be intended to induce in the dancers a state of "possession,"⁷ and after the performance of this ritual the dances began.

- [535] First of all two principal dancers, wearing what were evidently ceremonial jackets of red cloth, took, each of them, in one hand one of the wooden swords previously mentioned and in the other a bunch of leaves, and went in and out among the people with a queer shuffling step and a curious rhythmic brandishing of the swords and leaves. Once or twice the leader stopped, and laying his sword upon the head of some person in the crowd began to [787] prophecy.⁸ One prophecy, as interpreted to me by the Chief Headman, concerned the outbreak of cholera, and was in the form

⁷ The Seligmans, on pp. 134-5 of *The Veddas*, discuss at some length the nature of "possession" in the Vedda ritual dances.

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197] ⁸ My impression at the time was that in uttering these prophecies the leader of the dance used the Vedda language. Certainly the language used did not appear to me to be either Sinhalese or Tamil. It is true that the Seligmans say, in the passage quoted in the text, that the "old Vedda language" as spoken by the coast Veddas was found to be Sinhalese; but (i) it seems at least possible that the Vedda language may remain to some extent in ritual use among them; and (ii) I am inclined to think that in the ceremony here described the invocation of Rahu Yaku, described by the Seligmans on pp. 254-5 of *The Veddas*, was combined with the worship of Ammal and Kapalpe, described by

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of an exhortation to the villagers not to be afraid, as no harm would come to them. It need hardly be said that such a prophecy was extremely *à propos* from my point of view. I began to think that perhaps the Chief Headman was right and the time spent upon the ceremony was not wholly wasted.

The two principal dancers at length finished their dance and returned to their station near the shrine; and in their place ten or a dozen people, with a very old man as *choregos*, danced a similar dance, threading their way among the ranks of the people in single file. From time to time they would suddenly break off their dance, and rushing back tumultuously to the open space about the "maypole" would beat upon the pole with the bunches of leaves which each of them held in either hand, crying "Wach! wach! wach!" The Chief Headman, himself a Hindu, gave me the following interesting interpretation of the symbolism of this dance:—"The pole represents Brahma, the Source of Life, and the dancers wandering about among the people represent human life, at the end of which the soul returns to its Creator for a while with glad cries."

Later this dance was again danced by the same persons, led by the two red-jacketed principal dancers. Then the announcement was made that the goddess was coming from the river, and the two principal dancers began a very solemn, ecstatic dance under a canopy. As they danced the excitement grew tenser and tenser and their motions became more and more convulsive. They were firmly held by those near them,—a precaution necessary, the Chief Headman assured me, to prevent them from running amok among the spectators,—and seemed to struggle to shake off the restraint thus put upon them. Gradually, however, their efforts slackened, and they finally sank unconscious upon the ground.*

them on pp. 335-9, and that the "principal dancers" mentioned were not coast Veddas, but were brought in from outside. The point is one of some interest; but as, unfortunately, I did not go into it at the time, I do not feel at all certain about it.

* The Seligmanns say on p. 134 of *The Veddas*, "Most sincere practitioners whom we interrogated in different localities agreed that . . . they never entirely lost consciousness." After the dance here described the

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123 It was now two o'clock in the morning, and, though the ceremony was by no means concluded, I had seen enough of it to appreciate its general nature and it behoved me to get a little sleep in preparation for the day's work before me. Accompanied by the Chief Headman I made my way back along the jungle paths and across the open spaces, still white in the moonlight,—with the throb of the tom-tom behind me becoming fainter and fainter as I pursued my way,—to the quiet of my lodging.

R. B. NAISH.

[796 dancers lay upon the ground and certainly appeared to be genuinely
789 and completely unconscious for about ten minutes, i.e., up to the time
at which I left the clearing.

- 123 We had hardly gained the base of the rock when we heard human voices and soon came up with three men and their dogs. One fellow [411] carried a gun, the others had axes hitched to their shoulders. They [412] were on their way to a devil dancing ceremony at a house of illness some miles away; but abandoning their project they accompanied us to their homes.

621 In a small clearing stood half a dozen leafy shelters. Outside one of [342] these, three women with infants at the breast were seated roasting small yellow flowers. The rest of their people were at work on a *chena** close by. We summoned them and soon we had all the Veddas of the *Kosgaha* [162] *Ulpotta* before us—some six or eight men and about a dozen women and [164] children. They were a poor lot bearing the stigmata of malaria and [146] framboesia. There was but one old man among them. The children were emaciated and languid.

144 Most of them showed strong traces of Tamil admixture, especially the women; what poor ornaments they wore, their clothing, and even [177] their very names were Tamil; and so were their predilections if the coy smiles one or two of them bestowed on the fine Tamil that accompanied us signified anything. There were at least three men, however, true to [142] Vedda type—short of stature, wild-eyed, with beardless face and up-standing frizzly hair.

411 They had no bows among them, except as playthings for the children, but made us one as a memento and stained it with charcoal and [524] *thimbiri* to give it the appearance of use.

342 The huts were fashioned of wattle and leaves, and thatched with dry [415] grass. Their domestic appointments comprised earthen pots, a wooden pestle and mortar, bark rope, and a deer skin or two.

262 Fruits, flowers, wild yams, honey, the flesh of animals, *kurrukhan*† and maize formed their food. The meat they fancied most was that of [224] the langur and monitor lizard which they hunted with the lazy mongrels [231] that loitered about. They eat abundantly and at any hour when food is plentiful; but as a rule one good meal a day is all they expect; in [264] times of dearth they bear hunger stoically, chewing incessantly a few [261] varieties of bark they carry in pouches fashioned of cloth saturated with [415] melted wax (*ilce rethee*). Partial nomads, they spend many months [221] of the year under trees and in caves. Where the *palu*, *veera*, *kong*, or [222] *mora*† fruit is ripe, where the hives are, there they take their women and children, dogs, and chattels and go.

515 "How often do you bathe?" I asked one of them, the smell of their ring-wormed bodies suggesting little acquaintance with water.

"What bathing for us," he replied. "We fall into a stream once in a way and get out again; that is our bath. And we only do that when our stomachs are full. When we are hungry we don't care for anything; we can eat even a man then!"

904 In answer to the question how they measured distances and what [276] constituted a mile, the reply was, "We walk till our legs hurt, then we place our axes on the ground, sit down, take out our pouches, and chew a quid; that is our mile".

[137] *A patch of forest cleared for cultivation

†*Eleusine coracana*

‡*Mimusops hexandra*, *Hemicyctia septaria*, *Schleichera trijuga*, *Nephelium longana*, respectively.

2. FOREST CHILDREN

621 THE village of Potuliyadda lies in the heart of the country of the Henebedde Veddas. We had hoped to take these people unawares in their homes some three miles away; but it was not to be; for a Vedda boy who had witnessed our arrival had forestalled us.

We were at lunch, when my friend, whose seat commanded a view of the jungle, quietly remarked, "Hullo; who are these? Veddas without a doubt."

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[622] Five men, armed with bows, arrows and axes, strode in single file under the leadership of a small one-eyed man, half of whose face was covered by an awful scar which puckered an eyeless socket, giving a touch of pathos to an otherwise harsh expression. Such was Poromola, chief of the Henebedde Veddas also called *Walaka* (bear) for obvious reasons. Then there was Handuna a fine type of wild man; though close on fifty his figure was well-knit, and this combined with his goatee beard and tousy head gave a strength and rugged dignity to his bearing. There were also a tall bearded man of forty, loquacious and sophisticated enough when you knew him; a lanky, slouching, beady-eyed fellow; a robust, curly-haired bumpkin; and lastly, the snub-nosed little mischief-maker to whom we owed the honour of this visit.

● 123 As the Veddas came up to us, they uttered some fierce jargon we did not understand. It was pretty obvious they were acting; and not caring to encourage them in this, I casually motioned them away. They retired mumbling. We recalled them later to find them in dudgeon, evidently not being used to such treatment. They stared mutely at us affecting not to understand a word of the Sinhalese in which I addressed them. I tried again and again, but not by the flicker of an eyelid did they signify comprehension. Civility and persuasion having failed, I tried the effect of candour, telling them that we were not gullible strangers and knew all about them. This also was without effect.

Opening Seligmann's book, which contained the portraits of these very Veddas taken ten years previously, we suited picture to prototype. They gazed uncritically with stolid intentness showing no surprise or enthusiasm. I asked them whether they remembered the author and his wife who had spent so much time with them and been so kind to them. One nodded, and the others' faces betrayed interest. Thus was the first barrier carried.

Gradually we won them over one by one; but despite our best efforts the conversation flagged. And we, tired of making all the advances simulated an indifference we far from felt, and took to our books.

"We are hungry," said Handuna after a while. "Will you not give us food?"

We could only offer them money, an almost useless thing to the Vedda. We had made the serious mistake of coming unprovided with a surplus of rice, betel, arecanut and tobacco; for the surest way to the heart of the Vedda is through his stomach. We

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were loath to purchase their intimacy with gifts. Time enough for that, when we had won them over by less humiliating means. Besides, these Veddas were evidently spoilt, and we wished to show them they were not the important personages they imagined themselves to be. 123 ●

"We are going then," said Handuna. It was now our turn for dejection. Was it for such an ungracious issue we had travelled so far?

I had a last card, having brought some neosalvarsan, a sovereign remedy for yaws so rife among these people. The offer was received with indifference. There was only one case among them, they said, and the patient was too ill to come. This being just what we wanted, I offered to visit them the next morning. [164]

"You cannot come where we live unless we allow you," said the irrepressible Kaira. "And we won't show you our caves or anything, unless you give us presents."

Sick with exasperation and disgust at the behaviour of these impossible children, I told them they could take our offer or leave it as they chose, and turned to other work. The result was a grudging acquiescence; and, leaving a guide behind, they went away.

A word of explanation regarding the sophistication of a people so remote. They were in fact about the purest-blooded Veddas extant; indeed, it was to this very circumstance they owed their disappointing behaviour; for it had attracted Seligmann among them. What that implied may well be imagined. To obtain the valuable sociological information with which his book abounds, he had gained the confidence of these folk with scrupulous consideration and kindness, showering on them gifts of all kinds. Moreover, the patient investigation of the most intimate details of their lives by such a man, heightened their self-esteem. Of this we had an amusing illustration. I was obliged to admonish a group of Sinhalese that embarrassed us with their attentions. A Vedda sidled up and, tapping me familiarly on the shoulder, whispered, "Those people don't like us, they are jealous of us. We and you gentlemen are one; they are different!" 156 114 [164]

To dismiss these Veddas as spoilt uninteresting folk would imply failure to discern their innate simplicity, beneath the veneer of pose and importunity, for which contact with an indulgent stranger had been responsible. In their homes they still are as artless as their forbears were before ever white man set foot on these shores.

We were out hunting early that afternoon, when a sudden snapping sound arrested our attention. The Vedda we were with listened a few seconds. "Catching *talagoyas*," (monitor-lizards), he said laconically. The excited barking of a dog and rebuking human voices soon confirmed his conjecture. Going up, we found two men, one of whom carried a large quivering monitor just killed; while two dogs, still spirited with the chase, danced round their victim and growled and snapped at us. One of the men now set about to disjoint the quarry's tail at the middle, leaving it connected only by a tag of sinew; then, slitting the submandibular web, he rove the tail through till it locked at the division, making the reptile eat its own tail as it were, and carried it neatly in a loop. The monitor is best hunted at high noon; after four in the afternoon it takes to trees and holes. 224 231

FOREST CHILDREN

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turned in like a child's, fell to my share. I was contemplating the proposition with disgust, when, to my surprise, I saw my companion bravely tackling his; he recommended the meat as savoury. Not to be outdone, I gingerly followed his example, remembering that the nearer the bone the cleaner the flesh. While our chauffeur not only refused his share, but turned away with green-visaged disgust at the behaviour of his masters. The Veddas meanwhile applied themselves heartily to the meal, crunching hungrily bones and all; the brain and liver they regarded as special delicacies. 262

Our next course was a fragment of *karrukkan* cake garnished with a pungent *sambol*; this was a more feasible dish—but for the sand one crunched with every bite. A handful of honey-comb brought the dreadful meal to a welcome close. It did not occur to our hosts that water for cleansing would be acceptable; a procedure they ignored, wiping their hands instead on the posts of the hut, their own bodies, or filthy loin-rags. The chatty in which they brought us water could no more stand on its base than an egg. 515

So far we had seen none of their women, but had heard subdued female voices in the adjoining room, and surprised the glint of dark inquisitive eyes between the bark-slats. It required no little persuasion to bring them out. Even to pose for their portraits these people wanted presents! There was not a woman among them who had the remotest pretensions to comeliness; what little of it they might possess, their graceless rags disguised. 123

About a half-mile from Handuna's hut were the dwellings of the one-eyed Poromola and the sophisticated Kaira. We found the former disconsolately seated in his airy shed, with a little child on his lap, no less wistful than its grandsire. Patiently they awaited the return of the old man's wife and daughter, with the handful of grain they would earn for the day by working on a *chena*. 361

We secured some bows and arrows of fine workmanship here, and an *ande* which we mistook for a large arrow-head; but Kaira taking it said, "This is what we dance with," and suiting the action to the word, twirled the implement, tang and point, between his fingers, or shouldered it gun-wise, while he performed the shuffling semi-circular movements of a Vedda dance. 411 535

Thus ended our visit to Henebedde. That night, as we lay in bed, we heard a Vedda stave shouted lustily into the dark. It came from the watcher of a neighbouring field on his lonely look-out, and served as a variant to the "hoos" with which he kept away foraging animals. The refrain, *Ma mini, ma mini, ma deyya*, (Oh! great man, oh! great man, oh! great God) told of soul-hunger even in a people so primitive. We took it for a token of hail and farewell from the land of the Veddas. 241 533

Embillene's only claim to a name lay in the open *ambalam* (travellers' lodge), built high on strong posts that elephants might pass through without being tempted to destroy it. Here we found a team of pack-bulls and their drovers. The head of the *tavalam** was a loquacious fellow who took the whole forest into his confidence. People as a rule talk quietly in the jungle, subconsciously respecting, as it were, its solemnity; not so these drovers; their discourse is high-pitched, from 600

*Team of pack bulls.